



NAUGATUCK VALLEY  
COUNCIL of GOVERNMENTS

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Testimony of  
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In Favor of Proposed Senate Bill 478

Transportation Committee  
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Thank you Chairman Maynard, Chairman Guerrero, and members of the Transportation Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Pat Gallagher and I am the Senior Planner at the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG). As the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), NVCOG is responsible for transportation planning in the Waterbury Urbanized Area. I am here today to express NVCOG's strong support for Proposed Senate Bill 478, which will expand bus service along Wolcott Street and Lakewood Road in the City of Waterbury.

In the Spring of 2014, NVCOG completed a bus ridership study for the Waterbury Division of CT Transit. The study indicated that from 2009 to 2013 weekday ridership increased by 56%, making it the fastest growing bus system in Connecticut. The NVCOG study recommended that the Connecticut Department of Transportation implement an increase in frequency for the existing Wolcott Street bus route and an extension of transit service to Lakewood Road and the Waterbury Plaza on Chase Avenue. This proposed route would improve access to jobs for transit-dependent residents, enhance pedestrian safety, alleviate overcrowding on the system's busiest routes, and improve on-time performance. In its *2014 Annual Report* the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission identified this proposed route as one of its top recommendations. Additionally, in December 2014, NVCOG surveyed 750 bus passengers as part of the ongoing Waterbury Area Transit Study. More passengers requested service to Lakewood Road than to any other destination in Waterbury.

The Waterbury Division of CT Transit serves as a vital link that connects transit-dependent residents to jobs, higher education, shopping, and social services. According to the latest estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, 18% of Waterbury households do not have access to a vehicle and another 40% have just one vehicle. The Waterbury Labor Market Area has the highest unemployment rate in the state. Unemployment among the area's transit-dependent residents is likely much higher. Approval of S.B. 478 would expand job opportunities by providing bus service along Lakewood Road, the last major commercial corridor in the city without transit access.

The proposed Wolcott Street and Lakewood Road route would serve several large residential complexes, two public housing communities, five supermarkets, two big-box stores, and numerous other small businesses. This is one of the most popular and densely populated auto-oriented corridors in the region, yet most of these destinations lack basic pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks, lighting, and crosswalks.

Getting to and from the nearest bus stop can be a long and unsafe ordeal, particularly for the elderly or disabled, or for riders pushing a stroller and carrying shopping bags. The winter months are particularly challenging for public transit users and pedestrians. Snow piles block roadway shoulders and bus stops, forcing pedestrians to share the street with vehicular traffic. From 2009 to 2013 there were 26 pedestrian accidents along the proposed route, all of which resulted in injuries. This bill would permit new "front door" pickup at retailers such as ShopRite, Stop & Shop, and Target, greatly enhancing pedestrian safety.

The Wolcott Street bus, the busiest route in Waterbury, operates just once an hour, resulting in severe overcrowding. Passenger counts conducted in 2013 indicate that the Wolcott Street bus is standing room only on 32% of weekday and 44% of Saturday trips, with as many as twenty standing passengers during peak hours. This bill would increase the frequency of service on Wolcott Street from once an hour to twice an hour, resulting in less overcrowding, improved on-time performance, and more comfortable and safe rides for passengers.

Passage of Senate Bill 478 will address many of the most pressing needs of Waterbury residents who rely on bus service. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.